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FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7580  
INFO RUEHZH/HAITI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 1771  
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY 1579  
RUEHQU/AMCONSUL QUEBEC PRIORITY 1002  
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL PRIORITY  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1410

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 000147

SIPDIS

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STATE FOR WHA/EX AND WHA/CAR  
S/CRS  
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD  
STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CAR  
INR/IAA  
WHA/EX PLEASE PASS USOAS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [CU](#) [ECON](#) [HA](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#)

SUBJECT: PREVAL PROVINCIAL SWING A MIXED BAG

REF: PORT AU PRINCE 38

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¶1. (U) This message is sensitive but unclassified -- please protect accordingly.

¶2. (SBU) Summary: President Preval recently made the first public tour outside the capital since assuming office. He spent two days in Haiti's Central Plateau, stopping to inaugurate a new hospital with U.S. public health luminary Dr. Paul Farmer, visiting the border, and making speaking appearances in several towns. Preval dished out lofty promises of future development in the region, including a sports/cultural center and a medical testing center. Repeating a theme of his recent public appearances, Preval emphasized 'national production' as the solution to Haiti's economic woes, and reiterated the preeminence of peace and security to Haiti's development. He also acknowledged that inflation is a problem and will take time and effort to rein in. Preval's 48-hour excursion finally showed him applying his considerable political skills in public outside the capital. While these appearances increased his visibility in the provinces, his grand promises and a number of maladroit statements generated some pushback from the crowds and a degree of critical media reaction. End summary.

¶3. (U) Kicking off his January 21-22 swing through Haiti's central plateau, President Rene Preval brought his star power to bear at the opening of a new Partners in Health (PIH) funded hospital in Lascahobas. (Note: Partners in Health, AmeriCares, and the Ministry of Public Health and Population (MSPP) joined forces to erect the Lascahobas hospital in just six months. Harvard medical professor and PIH founder, Paul Farmer, spearheaded the project. End note.) Preval entered the crowded pavilion to cheers of support from locals, students and visitors. Sporting jeans and a casual plaid shirt, the President spent five minutes walking around greeting the attendees and blowing kisses to the crowd. Dr. Farmer told Emboffs privately that Preval had jumped at the idea of participating when Farmer merely mentioned the opening to him offhand.

¶4. (U) In his keynote address, Preval indicated Lascahobas would be the site of the first of the sports/cultural centers

he promised in his Independence Day speech (reftel). He also vowed to build one of several proposed medical diagnostic centers at the Lascahobas hospital, stocked with scanners, ultrasound, x-ray and other equipment promised by Cuba. Preval then put Minister of Public Health Dr. Robert Auguste on the spot by asking him to confirm to the crowd that this was truly possible. Pointing to three Haitian doctors trained in Cuba, Preval stated that he wants to see a medical school built in Haiti, and beseeched Dr. Farmer's help with such a project. Preval then invited the American and Cuban doctors in attendance to join him on the stage, stating that he was contributing to "reconciliation."

¶15. (U) Preval continued his tour of the Central Plateau -- accompanied by Prime Minister Jacques-Edouard Alexis, Minister of Public Health Dr. Robert Auguste and Minister of Public Works Frantz Verella -- emphasizing local production and long-term peace and security. "We absolutely must preserve the climate of peace in order to attract investors and spur development," he said. He noted that the high price of oil on the world market made it difficult to bring down the cost of essential goods. Only national production, he said, could lower the cost of living, and he encouraged Haitians to consume local, not imported, products whenever possible. Preval made several stops around the Center Department, including the future home of a cross-border marketplace in Belladere and an agricultural center in Mirebalais.

¶16. (U) The Haitian press singled out several of Preval's cautionary calls for realism as evidence the President is shirking responsibility for citizens' wellbeing. His statement to the effect that Haitians should not have voted for him if they expected miracles provoked the most negative commentary. After learning that the majority of one audience he was addressing was unemployed, Preval said, "I did not

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promise you jobs." Answering complaints about the high cost of living, Preval simply said, "We've done what we could," and said that the remedy for high prices was increased local production. A clip shown on TNH national news showed Preval encountering pushback from some in the audience. Citizens interviewed on one local radio station monitored by Poloff commented, "The nation clearly has no chance with Rene Preval because prices increased during both his mandates," and pointed out "There is no national production." OPL spokesperson Paul Denis said Preval is unrealistic and shows no true determination to solve the nation's economic problems. Fusion spokesperson Micha Gaillard told Poloff that Preval's ideas are "just blather" until the Ministries present specific action plans for how to augment national production.

¶17. (SBU) Comment: Preval during his second term has rarely left the capital, and then only for private events or major traditional appearances such as the annual Independence Day speech in Gonaives. Although a campaigner with good political and crowd skills, Preval since his May 2006 inauguration has been oddly reticent about appearing in public. Upon hearing of this trip, Deputy SRSG Luiz Da Costa commented to Poloff "I've been trying to get him to do that sort of publicity tour for a year now." Preval's crowd-pleasing efforts -- blowing kisses to the throngs, riding a motorcycle taxi -- aimed to revive his image as a man close to the people. While his key themes of security and national production continue to meet with general approval, this trip demonstrated that Preval still lacks answers to rising public impatience over continuing mass joblessness and the high cost of living. His at times defensive and insensitive statements about the plight of his people tarnished some of the good will generated by the excursion.

SANDERSON